

July 7, 2009 - Murtha Supports Need for Hospital

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Murtha supports need for hospital

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U.S. Rep. John Murtha said Monday that he knows Brownsville needs a hospital and is dedicated to seeing that happen.

During a telephone town hall meeting for 40,000 residents living in Fayette, Greene, Washington and Westmoreland counties, Murtha answered questions and discussed a variety of topics ranging from money for infrastructure projects in rural areas to the future of the coal and steel industries.

Several questions dealt with healthcare, including the now-closed Brownsville Tri-County Hospital.

Murtha, D-Johnstown, and U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter, D-PA, met last week with hospital and local officials to discuss the future of the hospital.

In response to a question about the future of the hospital, Murtha said Monday he realizes community members need a healthcare facility.

"I know the need is there," he said.

Murtha said he told hospital officials that they must come up with a plan before any taxpayer money can be directed to the project.

"I told the folks there to come up with a plan. We need to see their plan before we put more federal money into it, we need to know exactly what the plan is," Murtha said. "There is no question about the need. We are doing everything we can."

Murtha said the hospital failed last time because a plan was not in place.

In addition to discussing the future of Brownsville Tri-County Hospital, Murtha discussed healthcare in general and said the government needs to work on legislation that will insure the millions of people currently without it in the United States.

Murtha said legislators are trying to work on a plan that will create competition and lower healthcare prices while also concentrating on preventative care.

Medicare is also a priority, he said, noting that major decisions will need to be made within the next several years to ensure the program continues to provide senior citizens ample healthcare.

"We're trying to figure out the exact direction we should go with Medicare. We want to make sure the senior citizens are taken care of in this country," Murtha said.

In regards to funding for infrastructure projects in rural areas, Murtha said he is well aware how difficult it is for small communities in southwestern Pennsylvania to afford installing sewage and public water.

Murtha said he believed money from the federal economic stimulus package should be made available to help pay for such projects.

"I met with the vice president today and told him we have to do more with sewage and water. We have communities that still have to boil their water, that

are dumping raw sewage into the streams," he said.

Murtha said he is a strong supporter of infrastructure projects that better the quality of life and reduce pollution.

"Nobody's done more for sewage and water in the district than I have," he said.

Also in regards to pollution, Murtha said he has and is a strong supporter of the coal and steel industries but said both need to abide by guidelines to reduce pollutants.

Murtha said he voted in favor of the cap and trade bill, which was passed June 26 in the U.S. House of Representatives, despite outcry from his constituents because he believes the bill will help the environment and hopefully stimulate the economy through the creation of green energy jobs.

Murtha said he heard the same criticisms 40 years ago when he began working on clean stream legislation.

"We didn't have any fish in our streams, we had oil run off ... we got the same calls then saying the world's going to come to an end (if the legislation was passed). But it didn't come to an end. Instead the air got cleaner. The water got cleaner," he said.

Murtha said he will continue to support the coal and steel industries but will also support clean energy.

"I've done everything I could for the coal industry, because I believe very strong in it, but on the other hand we have to have clean air," he said.

Other topics Murtha discussed during the telephone town hall meeting included the ongoing war in Iraq and Afghanistan, illegal immigration, the federal deficit and his buy-American stance.

In regards to those topics, Murtha said he stands by his statement that it's time to end the war and bring the troops home.

As for immigration, he said the United States needs to create a system so that employers can verify people they are hiring have a valid social security number so that illegal immigrants are not hired, adding that strict penalties need to be put into place that will punish employers who knowingly hire illegal

immigrants.

In addition, Murtha said he is concerned with the federal deficit and said the country must reduce its debt. However, he said the first priority should be getting people back to work.

Murtha said the United States needs to produce more of its own goods instead of importing items from other countries.